

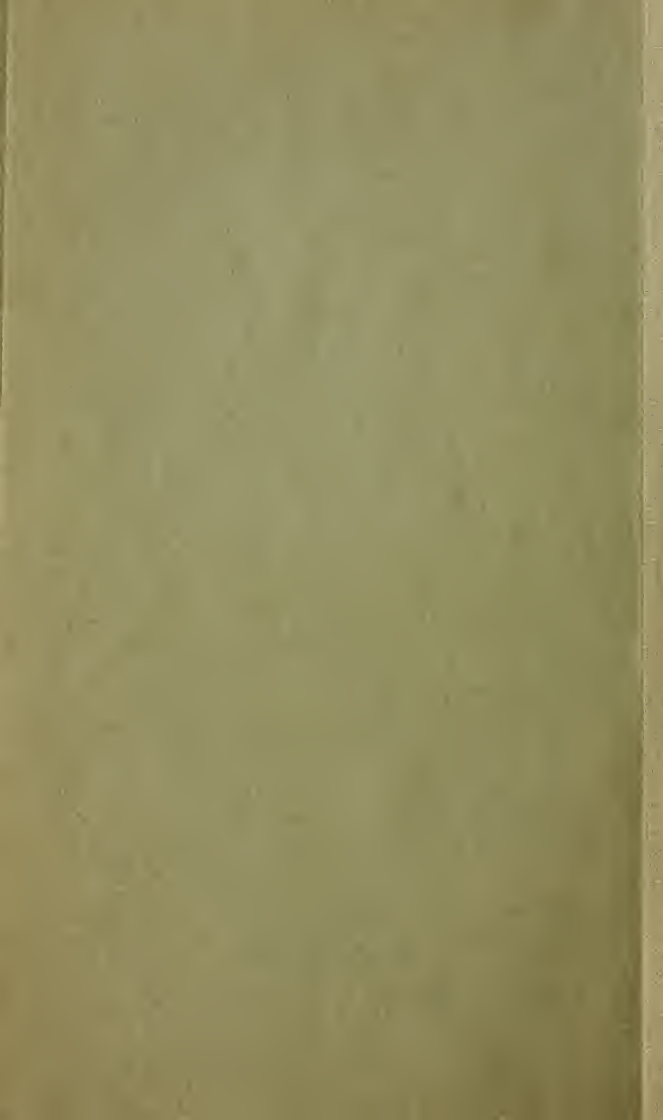
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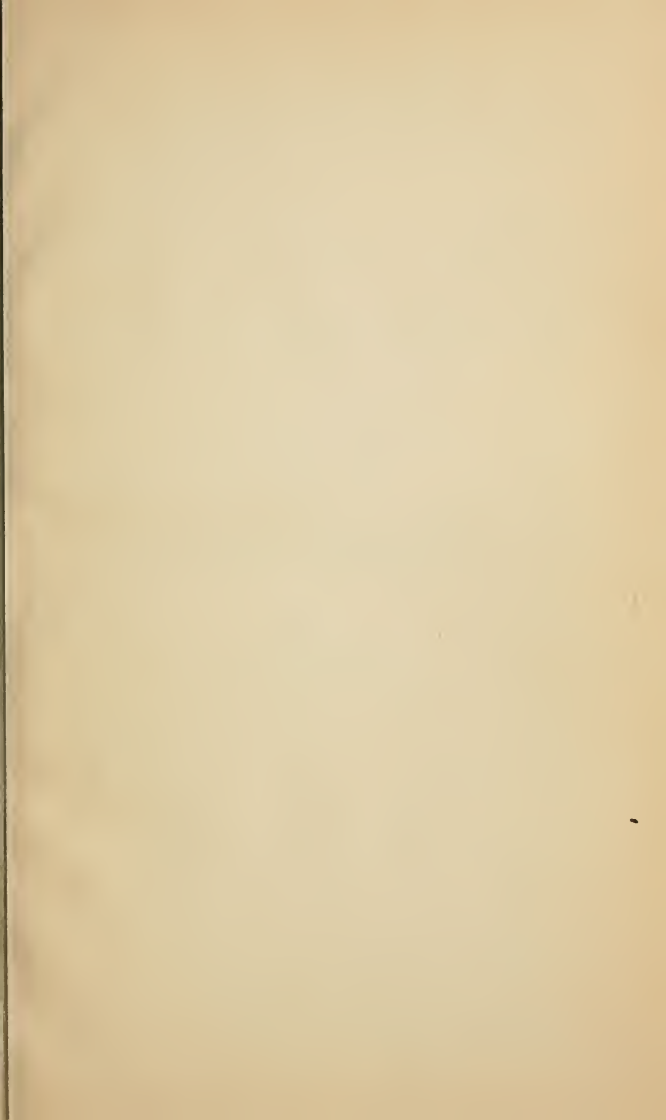


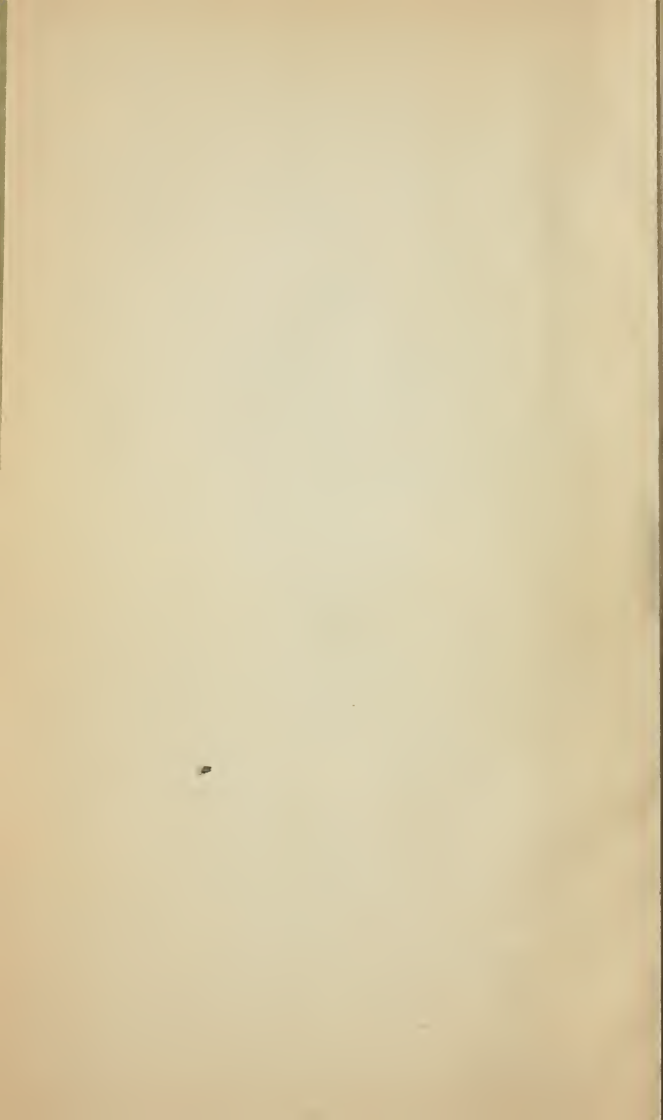
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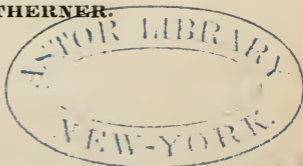
THE HIGHER CLASSES

OF

COLORED SOCIETY

IN PHILADELPHIA.

BY A SOUTHERNER.



PHILADELPHIA.

MERRIHEW AND THOMPSON, PRINTERS.

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## PREFACE.

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IN presenting this little volume to the public, a few words prefatory may not be amiss. Its author does not pretend to have entered fully into the general condition of colored society in Philadelphia ; but has merely glanced at some of the chief characteristics, with the design, first, to remove some of the unfounded prejudices from without ; and secondly, to correct certain abuses which are known to exist among themselves.

The idea of “ Higher Classes ” of colored society is, it must be confessed, a novel one ; and will, undoubtedly, excite the mirth of a prejudiced community on its annunciation. Nevertheless, it is perfectly correct and pro-

per—and is only objectionable in its connexion here, because the definition given of the “higher classes” is too liberal in its construction, and may be made to embrace a far greater number than it is intended to include. This, however, could not be well avoided—it was found a difficult case to decide intelligibly otherwise—and a proper discrimination left to the intelligent reader.

Others, again, there are, who like to see their neighbors’ merits caricatured, and their faults distorted and exaggerated,—will expect burlesque representations, and other laughter exciting sketches, and probably be thereby led to procure this little volume for the purpose of gratifying their *penchant* for the ludicrous. Now, while I desire not to put any thing in the way of its *sale*, be the motive for purchasing what it may, yet all such are in-

formed—but they must first procure it before they can possess the information!—that they will find upon perusal, that they had indulged in a very erroneous impression.

As to the colored classes themselves, they will at once discover that none but the best of feelings throughout, has had any influence in guiding the pen of their humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

*Philadelphia*, June, 22, 1841.





S K E T C H E S  
OF  
COLORED SOCIETY, &c.

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CHAPTER I.

Introductory Observations—General Characteristics of  
Colored Society.

THE subject of men and manners has ever been one of interest and popularity with almost every class of readers. Our own evil dispositions naturally prompt us to ferret out the faults and foibles of others, seemingly as an apology or justification of our own. Weak and irresolute ourselves,—prone to inconsistency, instability, and absurdity,—it seems to afford a relief to the mind to have the follies and short-comings of our neighbors elaborately canvassed, under the vain impression

that in the general shout that may be raised over the exposed parties, our own misdeeds will be kept entirely out of view.

Although these remarks may not be justly applicable to all the world, yet it is most unquestionably true, that they are well deserved by the far greater portion of mankind. They are evidenced in the insatiable desire which pervades the reading classes, for productions of a defamatory character, as the "Journals," "Diaries," &c., of those writers who visit countries foreign to their own, for the purpose of collecting together a worthless compilation of ridicule and personal abuse, for retail among their countrymen on their return home. It is well known, that if the fruits of such labors were not of the calibre that is generally seen, their authors would be but poorly rewarded for the time, labor and expense consumed in their preparation; but they are well acquainted with the tastes—it may be said the wishes—of those for whose

entertainment they may have exerted themselves, and keeping in strict accordance therewith, their reward is certain. They well know that their patrons will expect ridicule, abuse, fault-finding, and all manner of idle gossip ; and, beside large draughts upon the imagination, they fail not to probe every vulnerable point, in order to comply therewith in the fullest measure. Their book, once completed, is sought with voracity, and if found to be well spiced with such ingredients as named, is highly approved, by no small portion of the monster public.

A yet more pointed and pertinent consideration, in sustenance of the position here approached, may be adduced from the fact, that when a work, of the character under notice, reaches the country of those who form or constitute its subject, it is speedily republished, and readily acquires a circulation, scarcely surpassed by the reception given it at the point of its original publication ! This may

arise from a pardonable curiosity to know what the author has said upon the various topics he may have chosen ; but it evinces something more. It shows that such is the anxiety of many persons for readings, as well as *hearings* of the kind, that rather than suffer deprivation of them, they will contribute to the encouragement of their own defamers !

Though fully aware, that there is ample field and abundant material for so doing, yet it is not for the purpose of administering to this depraved taste, that the writer of these pages has undertaken the censorship of the manners and morals of a certain class of the population of Philadelphia. This class, more for perspicuity, than for the purpose of originating any invidious distinctions in the body at large, I shall divide into and denominate the *higher classes* of colored society. In pursuit of this object, I disclaim all intention to make false representations, to administer wanton and undeserved ridicule, or to excite it in

others. If correct principles did not place me above this, I think some assurance might be gleaned from consanguinity ! While I shall not be forward to magnify the good or to extenuate evil, yet still, I would not have “aught set down in malice.”

The prejudiced reader, I feel well assured, will smile at the designation “higher classes of colored society.” The public—or at least the great body, who have not been at the pains to make an examination—have long been accustomed to regard the people of color as one consolidated mass, all huddled together, without any particular or general distinctions, social or otherwise. The sight of one colored man with them, whatever may be his apparent condition, (provided it is any thing but genteel !) is the sight of a community ; and the errors and crimes of one, is adjudged as the criterion of character of the whole body. But the first of these considerations is far from being correct ; the latter, too

openly palpable to command a moment's attention. Compared in condition, means, and abilities, there are as broad social distinctions to be found here, as among any other class of society; aye, and, it may be added, with as much justice, too;—for what are all human distinctions worth, founded otherwise than in virtue? True, it is readily admitted, they have not, to any great extent, the customary grounds which have always obtained, for marking their lines of separation with distinctness; but this is the fault of circumstances—the offspring of existencies which they had no agency in producing—and which they have never been able to surmount.

Taking the whole body of the colored population in the city of Philadelphia, they present in a gradual, moderate, and limited ratio, almost every grade of character, wealth, and—I think it not too much to add—of education. They are to be seen in ease, comfort and the enjoyment of all the social blessings

of this life; and, in contrast with this, they are to be found in the lowest depths of human degradation, misery, and want. They are also presented in the intermediate stages—sober, honest, industrious and respectable—claiming neither “poverty nor riches,” yet maintaining, by their pursuits, their families in comparative ease and comfort, oppressed neither with the cares of the rich, nor assailed by the deprivation and suffering of the indigent. The same in these respects that may be said of any other class of people, may, with the utmost regard to truth, be said of them.

They have their churches, school-houses, institutions of benevolence, and others for the promotion of literature; and if I cannot include scientific pursuits, it is because the avenues leading to and upholding these, have been closed against them. There are likewise among them, those who are successfully pursuing various branches of the mechanic arts; tradesmen and dealers of various descriptions,

artists, clergymen, and other professional gentlemen ; and, last of all, though not the least, men of fortune and gentlemen of leisure.

Their churches embrace nearly all the Christian denominations, excepting the papal, and those which may be considered *doubtful*, as I am not aware that there is any Universalists' society among them. Whether this arises from a determination to keep on the sure side here, and enjoy the benefit of others' doubts, if realized, hereafter, it has never occurred to me, till now, to inquire ! The Methodists are by far the most numerous, and next to these, in numerical order, may be named the Presbyterians, Baptists and Episcopalians. There is in existence, I believe, a Unitarian society ; but their house of worship, for the want of competent support, has, for some time past, been relinquished.

Mutual Relief Societies are numerous. There are a larger number of these than of



any other description, in the colored community. They are generally well sustained, to the great advantage of those who compose them. There are also one or more others, strictly devoted to objects of out-door benevolence. The last mentioned are chiefly composed of females.

I pass by here the several literary associations, proposing to make them a distinct subject in another place.

In addition to the public, or common schools supported by the commonwealth—for the continuance, and prosperity of which, much interest and solicitude has of late been manifested—there are also three or four private schools, male and female, conducted by colored teachers. The great facilities afforded by the first mentioned of these, has had the effect greatly to decrease the numbers in the private schools; nevertheless, the latter class still present a favorable condition—particularly the female—from the superior excel

lence of their government, and attention to the general deportment of the pupils.

In addition to this brief random glance at some of the more prominent features which distinguish colored society at large, the annexed statistical account is added for the convenience of those who desire accuracy on the subject. It is gleaned from a statement "showing the progress and present state of the colored population," compiled by the "Board of Managers of the American Moral Reform Society," and published in their first annual report, which latter was kindly furnished me, by the chairman of said Board, Mr. John P. Burr. Though the statement referred to, bears date as far back as 1837, yet it is presumable that no very remarkable changes, in most instances, have occurred since then; and as there has been no later enumeration in this wise, it is adopted, leaving the reader to form his own judgment in regard to more recent advancements.

For the City and County of Philadelphia,  
is given as the

|                                |     |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Number of Churches,            | -   | 15  |
| “ Clergymen,                   | - - | 34  |
| “ Day-schools,                 | - - | 21  |
| “ Teachers,                    | - - | 6   |
| “ Sabbath schools,             | -   | 17  |
| “ S. School Teachers,          | -   | 125 |
| “ Literary Societies,          | -   | 3*  |
| “ Debating “                   | -   | 3   |
| “ Mutual Relief or Benevolent, |     | 64  |
| “ Moral Reform,                | - - | 1   |
| “ Temperance,                  | - - | 4   |
| “ Lyceums,                     | - - | 1†  |

In the same tabular view, the number of mechanics for this city, are set down at 78; and real estate owned, and taxes, rents, &c., paid, at \$850,000. In what manner this eight hundred and fifty thousand dollars is

\*There has been some change in the character of one of these.

† Since formed.

proportioned among the population, rising nineteen thousand inhabitants, it is difficult to determine; though it appears to be undoubtedly true, that but a small number are actual free-holders, when compared with the whole body.

Thus much for generalities. The succeeding sketches, will be chiefly confined to that portion of colored society, which shall hereafter be indicated.

## CHAPTER II.

Remarks—The Higher Classes of Colored Society Defined  
—State of Education—Young Ladies, and their Accomplishments—Isolated instances avoided.

IT is with caution and timidity that I approach the principal subject of the present chapter. Like, in all matters of similar application, where distinctions and comparisons are involved, the greatest difficulty to the sensitive mind and feeling heart, arises from the indisposition to give offence. If one should approach a crowd of persons, point out a certain number, and pronounce them “gentlemen,” those who might be neglected in the designation, would be very apt to feel a little incensed toward the individual who made it. They would at least consider that he had given a negative opinion against *their* gentility. But this is not necessarily the case. Opinions are founded upon investigation, and

a knowledge of facts. If upon examination, it is found that a certain portion of any given class of persons have attained to particular positions in society—which also may be the aim, and within the probable reach of all of that class—in giving a statement of the fact merely, it is not to be inferred, that any opinion is passed upon the merits of those who may not have yet arrived at the supposed point.

“ Order is Heaven’s first law ; and this confest,  
Some are, and must be, greater than the rest—  
More rich, more wise.”

In the present case, however, it must be confessed, that the difficulty of establishing, successfully, a distinguishing line of separation is very great. The embarrassment arises altogether from the absence of those landmarks, which have always obtained in fashionable society, and which many may consider indispensable to make plain to others that which is sufficiently obvious to those

who are aware of the facts. I am to present a boundary between a class of persons whom the great body of the public have been accustomed to consider so closely allied to each other, as to render it very improbable, if not impossible, that any social differences could be held in recognition among them. This is a great error, it is true, but it does not much lessen the difficulty. The chief grounds of distinction among men, are founded upon wealth, education, station, and occupation. In other countries, birth, or family connexion, will go a great way towards promotion; but unattended by either of the former, it is soon forgotten—it will not stand alone. But here are none of these, to an extent which would warrant their, or either of them, being made the point of departure. I have not the foundation of wealth; because the number who may be permitted to come under that denomination are too limited, to be justly made the standard of the men and manners of the whole

body. Beside this, there are other objections—objections which will be discernible when it is known that I cannot make moral worth, strictly speaking, the standard ; for in that case it might be necessary to exclude a number of those who are denominated wealthy! Neither may I erect upon education, nor occupation; as among the higher classes—unless an unjust and illiberal contrast is sought—there is no very remarkable difference any where to be found.

Having thus, then, exhibited the difficulty of my situation, it will be seen that in determining the higher classes of colored society, it will be necessary to glean the materials from persons of all grades of moderate possessions, education, moral worth, (as outwardly adjudged,) and whose occupations generally present but little difference. What, therefore, I would have the reader understand by the designation “higher classes,” as here applied, consists of that portion of



colored society whose incomes, from their pursuits or otherwise, (immoralities or criminalities of course excepted,) enables them to maintain the position of house-holders, and their families in comparative ease and comfort. This definition probably includes a greater number than will come within the scope of my sketches; and it may be that a few who are eligible, will be by it excluded. It is, however, the best that can be given—the exceptions are unavoidable. It would likewise seem to be liberal enough to suit the most captious !

The education of this class is by no means so limited as the uninformed are accustomed to imagine. The seniors, it is true—or most of them—appear not to have enjoyed the great advantages of early training of the mind; but they possess a practical education—a general knowledge of all important matters—and an intelligence which fit them for the occupancy of all the useful stations of life, wherein an

extensive knowledge of letters is not required. They turn their experience to good account—look forward to no extraordinary changes in this life—and so govern themselves, as, at least, to maintain the position at which they may have arrived, if they do not improve it. Having often had occasion to feel the necessity of a good education themselves, they have thereby been led to spare no exertion for securing the same to their children; so that the young men and young ladies of their generation, present, in this wise, quite a different aspect. They have enjoyed many of those advantages of which their parents were deprived; and it may be said, without exaggeration, that the most of them have equalled, and many far surpassed, the best opportunities afforded them. It must be borne in mind that they are opposed by many and varied restrictions and discouragements, at almost every step in the pursuit of knowledge—that it is almost impossible for them to obtain, in

an open, honorable way, a thorough classical education here, whatever may be their ability for entering the pursuit—and they are therefore, after completing an ordinary school course, thrown mainly upon their own, and such other resources for further advancement, as they may privately gather about them. But even in this irregular way, and in the face of all embarrassments, some of the young men have attained to a degree of intelligence and general information, which, with a little instruction in regard to details, fit them for any and all of the useful stations in life; and to the highest of which, were they otherwise situated, they might with great propriety aspire.

If it be asked why the young men do not give greater exhibition of the truth of this assertion, it is answered that they are but men—endowed with the same human nature that characterizes any other division of the human family—and more should not be ex-

pected of them, than of any other class similarly circumstanced. The machinery of the watch will not fulfil its intent, unless the impulse of the spring be applied ; and, though things inanimate are not to be compared with the human soul, yet, neither can a man be expected to rise to eminence in a given department, where, as in the case of men of color, there is not only an absence of all encouragement—all impulse—all definite motive to cheer him onward—but from the exercise of the legitimate functions of which, even were he fitted therefor, he would be absolutely excluded ! He may indeed reach the base of the hill of science ; but when there, casting his eye upward, what does he behold ? Brethren ready to extend the hand of greeting and congratulation, when he hath made the ascent ? No ; not so with the man of color : need I say what reception *he* would be most likely to meet with ?

But the young men of color do give many

evidences of their intellectual acquirements and worth. They are confined to a narrow field; and hence those who would be convinced, must seek them on their own premises. The literary associations among them must be visited; their debating societies must be scanned; the talent which they exhibit in acting upon all public matters, of immediate concern to them, must be taken into consideration; and the result will be, that no unprejudiced mind will have cause to depart in disappointment of the realization of any just expectation. The wonder, indeed, will be most likely to turn upon the fact that they have arrived at the point of intelligence and refinement, which they already evidence on such occasions, and in such matters. True it is, the body may be destroyed; but the mind—the immortal mind—will rise above the flesh; it cannot be entirely crushed.

“ Mind, mind alone, bear witness earth and heaven !  
The living fountain in itself contains  
Of beauteous and sublime ;”

and these qualities, wherever existing, will, in greater or less degree, sooner or later, burst forth and show their paternity.

In the departments of the lighter accomplishments, likewise, the higher classes of colored society show much advancement and proficiency. The young ladies, especially, are deserving of notice in this respect. In addition to the usual branches of education, many of them show much taste and skill in painting, instrumental music, singing, and the various departments of ornamental needlework, &c. They, too, have their literary associations for mutual improvement. The order of their exercises in these, consists, principally, of readings and recitations of appropriate compositions, both original and selected. It has not transpired, that the ladies' associations have yet introduced the form of systematic debates. If such an introduction were made, there is little cause to doubt, but

that great improvement would result therefrom. It would at least be the means of promoting conversational powers ; and ease and fluency, in this respect, is an accomplishment certainly well worthy the aim of all.

In thus speaking of the state of education among this class, it is by no means my aim, or even my remotest desire, to claim for them more than they actually deserve. It is not my purpose, to endeavor to excite the belief that they possess qualities and attainments, which, upon examination, would prove to be otherwise. My intention is to render credit for that alone for which it is due, and for nothing more.

Had a different course been chosen, more than here appears might probably have with justice been said. But isolated instances have been avoided. The professional men—the educated ministry—the physicians—the artists—have not been made the theme ; but

society in a body, as it would be found by a stranger visiting. And let none say that these instances do not exist. There are one, two, three, or more colored ministers in this city, who would do honor, if it may so be spoken, to any pulpit, not only for their exemplary piety, but because of the intellectual ability they evidence in their calling. Will it be set down as a disparagement of the merits of the others, if among these, the liberty is taken—pardonable, it is hoped—of naming the Rev. WILLIAM DOUGLASS, Rector of St. Thomas' Protestant Episcopal Church? No such invidious comparison is intended; none, it is hoped, will be inferred. As to the physicians, there are several of them; in practical anatomy and surgery, they may be deficient; and though they may not have drank so deep at the fountain of classical lore as some of their contemporaries, still, in the great end of the practice of physic—the healing of the sick—



they would not suffer by comparison with a large number who have enjoyed such advantages. For the artists, there is at least one, whose progress has no doubt been fully equal to his most favorable opportunities.

In contrast with the favorable view here presented, I shall proceed, in the next chapter, to give an exposition of some of the follies and vices, which corrupt the social intercourse, and furnish a great obstacle to the further mutual improvement of the higher classes of colored society.

## CHAPTER III.

General Remarks—Divisions among the Higher Classes of Colored Society—Causes which lead thereto—Disreputable Conduct of Parties—Insincerity of Young Ladies toward each other—Breaches of Confidence—Detraction—Slander—“Northerners” and “Southerners”—Another bad feature—Miscellaneous Observations.

IF men generally would but contemplate how vain, how ridiculous, and oftentimes how silly, are the various pretences to superiority, which one class of men frequently set up over another, surely, in very shame for past errors, we should all be speedily brought back to the only true and just standard—the MIND;—the *mind*, as developed in the goodness—the virtue—of its possessor. If it be “by the color of the soul” that “we shall be judged at last,” why are we not content now to make this the standard of our decision, in passing upon our fellow-creatures? He that

is least disposed to dishonor the image of his Maker—why not give him precedence in determining who is most worthy to be taken into companionship? But no: this equitable rule of the Creator, will never serve the purposes of the poor, weak creature, man. He is too well aware, that if the trite couplet of poor Richard should be held in strict observance, and be carried into practice, many who now, in perfect assurance, wear the dignity of “men,” would soon be reduced and compelled to bear the title merely of “fellows.” Hence it is necessary for such, in order to sustain their elevation, to call in accidental or adventitious circumstances to their aid; and where “worth” is wanting, if something from the catalogue of these may be read in its place, the difficulty is at once adjusted—the scale is at once poised in their favor. This is the ground, above all others, that obtains among men, in regulating and adjusting dis-

inctions in society; upon such foundation have they ever rested; and, until the advent of some happier period—patiently looked for, but yet to dawn upon us—we have no reason to apprehend any very beneficial change. The religious world has never exhibited a tithe of the horror at its unreserved and indiscriminate intercourse with the sinners—the sheep, the goats, and the wolves of the human family—that one class of these same worldlings are seen to manifest at the idea of contact with another!

The sources of divisions in society here referred to, have no certain and fixed boundaries, but are purely arbitrary. They are common among all classes—the exclusives and the excluded—each establishing its own standard of government and adherence; and as they are traced downward, the primary rule seems to be—“that there are none so

low, but others may be found a link beneath them.”

The higher classes of colored society in Philadelphia, are amenable to a liberal share of animadversion, on account of the numerous divisions which exist among them. However they may appear to the eye of the casual observer to be resolved into one unbroken link, yet, he who is acquainted with their social relations, well knows that this seeming unity is quite contrary to the actual existence, and true state of things, in this respect. There are numerous distinct social circles, even among those equally respectable and of equal merit and pretensions, every way; and if these were confined within proper and legitimate limits—as each has the undoubted right to choose his or her private friends—there is certainly nothing in the fact to excite surprise or call forth censure. But they are not thus confined. They are carried

into most of the relations of life, and in some instances are kept up with the most bitter and relentless rancor—arising, however, in such extreme cases, from ancient feuds or personal disagreements, which have descended perhaps from father to son, and so been perpetuated! I do not intend to represent, that there is always an open hostility kept up; it may appear dormant for the while; but favored by the time and the occasion, and often when the occasion would seem loudly to forbid, it seldom fails to develop its existence. It is the personification of true revenge,

“—— patient as the watchful alchemist,  
Sagacious as the blood-hound on the scent,  
Secret as death.”

Secret—until the opportunity offers of making its victim feel its presence. But where those personal dislikes or hates do not exist—where the social separation springs solely from the exercise of the unquestionable right, to choose

one's private associations and companions—the case is widely different; and in all other relations, they meet each other on terms of apparent amity and good will.

The separations, however, in all cases, are seen to produce rivalry between the different circles; and in settling the claim to precedence and superiority, the character and reputation of one or the other of the parties, is almost sure to suffer, that being the first thing aimed at. An effort of this description, when set on foot, involves the basest of means for carrying it forward, and frequently nothing is left undone that malignant mischief can invent, for destroying the peace, happiness, and success of any one party or individual, who or which may become obnoxious to another.

The chief causes which lead to divisions in the society of the colored classes, are, in turn, the very result of these divisions. They are not to be found in any real pride of self-con-

ceited superiority ; for they well know that any pretension of this kind, founded otherwise than in personal good qualities, would never avail them aught beyond their own immediate pale, and among those who know them, would be laughed to scorn. They lie deeper or nearer the surface, as the reader pleases. There is an unhappy disposition, untiring and ever constant, to detract the one from the merits of the other ; and if possible to thwart every plan or scheme, by which a few may be benefitted, unless it is made more than obvious, that all may equally partake of such benefit. The motto is changed from “live, and let live,” to “let *me* live *first*, and you afterwards.” This reprehensible disposition, it may be truly said, is carried into nearly all the relations of life. The more determined in its practice, will disregard every honorable consideration, whenever they set themselves about to arrest the career of some one of their acquaintances, who may appear



to be more successful in some particular department than themselves. Instead of following the example of their more industrious neighbors—of letting the good fortune of these furnish a motive to their own laudable exertions—their first efforts are directed to discredit and to destroy. Thus, because they either will not, or cannot move themselves, they stand ready to grasp, and to hold back, all those who would advance. In this way many lose more time—waste more anxiety—than would be required to make them all they could reasonably wish to be. And what are the means of success, usually resorted to in such cases? Falsehood the most vile, slander, the most opprobrious, hypocrisy, violated faith, social traitorism,—these, with their sub-divisions and concomitants, furnish the chief weapons for keeping up the odious strife.

The influence of such a course of conduct upon those who are subject to its operation,

is easily perceptible. Suspicion and distrust very naturally usurp the place of confidence ; and without confidence—without mutual reliance the one upon the integrity of the other; no circle of society can long exist together in unbroken harmony. Division after division, must necessarily be the consequence, upon the discovery of each new conspiracy, by any aggrieved party; for surely no person of common sense, would a second time repose full confidence in those who, without provocation, had, by the use of the basest of means, shown themselves so eminently unworthy of it. And such discoveries, unfortunately, are too frequently made—quite too frequent, for the general good and improvement of colored society !

Those who are always the greatest sufferers from the shafts of envy and malice, aimed at their destruction, are those young ladies who are so *unfortunate*—so it may be regarded in many instances !—as to become

objects of jealousy to their associates. Be the cause of offence real or imagined, and never so trifling—and though the newly appointed victim may have had no direct agency in producing it—still it makes no difference with her inexorable persecutors. The late, perhaps, bosom friend, is now an object of aversion to the circle of her sex in which lately she moved and appeared to be esteemed, and must fare according to the usage which, with them, in such cases governs. This not being the kindest or most sisterly, is not always to be coveted !

This insincerity in the conduct of the young ladies toward each other, is remarkable in various other ways, and to an extent almost incredible. If a young man makes his appearance in society, whose position and prospects render him worthy of being sought for as a prize, by any or all of the marriagable ladies of a circle, you may rest assured that if he chooses at all, the one so decided upon will be marked out by her companions—her

dear, confidential friends!—as one whose character must speedily be blackened, in order, if possible, to prevent any consummated results! They may probably first “sound” (as the vulgar phrase goes) the young lady on the subject—first “feel her pulse well”—and if they find she is likely to make a “case” of the gentleman’s proposal, they will leave nothing available untried to make a *case* of her!

Suppose those who engage in such crusades are successful in their design, what but a fiendish satisfaction, can it afford? The satisfaction of having been instrumental in destroying, perhaps, for ever the happiness of a fellow creature!—that fellow creature an innocent young lady!—that young lady late you proclaimed your friend! Is there any thing in nature more heartless and inhuman?

It is known that young men!—start not reader!—it is known that those who *call* themselves MEN, have been engaged in simi-

lar noble exploits against innocence and virtue!—but for the honor of our common nature, they are passed by!

I could give numerous instances, to prove the correctness of these representations, if it were deemed proper. But I am additionally deterred from so doing because of the personal references it would necessarily involve; and a charge of this nature, I desire not to incur. I can, however, scarcely refrain from referring to a case in point, which has occurred within two or three weeks of the present writing. An instance of a more unprincipled and fiend-like attempt, to blast the fair fame of an innocent and harmless young lady, and that, too, by her *ci-devant* FRIENDS, is rarely to be met with. It is not likely, however, that she will ever suffer much inconvenience from the vile imputations which have been so wantonly and so unjustly cast upon her. Falsehood, it is true, may travel a great way while truth is preparing for the journey; but

the latter, though slow, never fails most effectually to do its office in obliterating error, and of shielding the innocent from the vultures of our species, who are ever seeking to prey upon their happiness.

Think me not ungallant, ladies!—think me not ungallant for thus spreading before the world, some of the vices, which, wherever they obtain among you, are calculated so thoroughly to degrade your character—to

“—— blight your fair fame

As whirlwinds nip the tender buds of spring,”

and render you worthy of being shunned by all who have once discovered their existence. It is for your good that I have done so; 'tis that you may view their odious character and reform the heinous abuses; and that, in your mutual intercourse, you may pursue those dictates only, that are commendable of virtue. Banish envy—banish jealousy—banish hypocrisy and deceit; and with these will be banished that hateful spirit of detraction and

slander, which now renders each one of you a terror to the other, and makes such sad havoc with the reputations of all who come within the reach of the blighting influence. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend ;" and it is alone in friendship that I thus openly rebuke you. If it shall be found to result in your improvement—if, to any extent, you are led to think seriously of the matter, and are thus benefitted—I shall be more than rewarded for the disagreeable task of here giving it record.

There are other causes of disaffection and disunion among the higher classes of colored society, which might have been before noticed ; but they are either so limited or intricate as to command but little attention. Among these might be named those which arise from real or pretended sectional preferences. The prejudices said to exist in some instances between the natives and the southern families that have located among them,

are of this character. I do not think the "northerners" have any just cause of complaint against the conduct of the "southerners" in this respect. The latter are true and faithful in their friendships, while they find a like reciprocation ; and it is not to be wondered at, that they should be equally faithful to themselves, in resisting further intercourse, whenever and wherever they discover opposite qualities on the part of the former. But instances of this kind, as before intimated, are but limited ; the southerners are held in esteem by the northerners, generally ; and notwithstanding some young ladies "can't bear the southerners," it does not appear likely that either party will ever suffer much from the prejudice.

Another bad feature in the circles of the higher classes of colored society, is that which requires of those who obtain admission into any particular one, a total surrender of their independence to the whims or caprices of the



majority who compose it. In fact one must make up his mind to be governed entirely by their feelings—their affections and aversions;—love those whom they love—hate those whom they hate—slander those whom they slander—and laud those whom they speak well of. Any exhibition of the right of opinion, in such matters, is very apt to beget for him who has the boldness to show it, the indifference of the other members of the circle—excite in their bosoms suspicions of his attachment to them—and thereupon he is very apt to find his society suddenly “cut,” before, perhaps, he is fully aware of the cause! It may be, however, that they have “searched the scriptures” for this rule of their government, and are determined to consider all who are “not with them,” to the utmost extent required, as being decidedly “against them.”

Although I have here spoken in terms of general application, in reccounting some of

the more prominent vices, that are in practice among the higher classes of colored society, yet I would by no means have it understood that they are all equally vulnerable in this respect. There are exceptions—honorable exceptions—in the ranks of both male and female. There are young ladies, whose virtues, purity of mind and strict moral worth, render them in no wise amenable to my censures,—who are as incapable of the practices adverted to, as any to be found in any other division of society ;—but whose misfortune it is to be brought in social contact with those to whom this exception cannot justly apply.

Those therefore whom it will fit, will readily recognise the garment—and it is hoped will endeavor to repair it ;—and such as it would illy become, will concur heartily in the most unlimited denunciation of its wear.

The vices of the higher classes in all countries, are no less those of the better informed, and more wealthy portion of those who form

the subject of these sketches. The vulgar and indecent practices which obtain foothold among them, and which would perhaps for ever soil the fame of any one of the plain, unostentatious, unpretending members of plebian society in the estimation of his associates, are by them termed “fashionable foibles,” and he or she who is not an adept in such matters, is looked upon as a “simpleton,” or a “flat;” or is otherwise regarded in the light that one would be who should appear in a ball-room and offer to lead in the dance, with brogans upon his feet—a grossly ignorant and unfashionable fellow! It is not of course for the want of education or of better information, but in truth the very possession of these, which they consider—conjoined with wealth—confers upon them the privilege of establishing and adhering to just whatever regulations and practices, under the name of “fashion,” their corrupt fancies may lead them to. So with many of those at

whose vices I have aimed. Their demeanor in the eyes of the world, is by no means in consonance with such conduct.\* They are as fully sensible of the importance of "keeping up appearances," as any that can be named, and are as equally successful in maintaining them.

The succeeding chapter will serve in some measure to show the ability of the higher classes of colored society to maintain social intercourse, on terms as creditable and honorable as the most fastidious could desire, and to the satisfaction of the most pungent and carping of moralists.

\* Let it be here distinctly understood, that I design not to impute any greater criminality or grosser immorality, than has been distinctly designated.

## CHAPTER IV.

Social Intercourse—Visiting—Evenings at Home—Amusements and Conversation—Evening Parties—Guests—Hours of Retirement—Habits of Temperance at private Parties—General Remarks.

THE prejudiced world has for a long time been in error, in judging of what may be termed the *home condition*, or social intercourse, of the higher classes of colored society, by the specimens who in the every day walks of life are presented to their view as the “hewers of wood and the drawers of water.” This rash mode of judgment—the forming an opinion of the beauty of the landscape merely by the heavy shading in the fore-ground of the picture, has long been the source of many groundless and unjust aspersions against their general character, and one which common justice requires should be removed. It is equally erroneous to adjudge

all to be saints, because of the few good ; as to suppose all are in a state of servitude and degradation, because it is not denied that the majority are in close approximation to that condition. With the latter, however, I profess not to concern myself here ; but may say with great propriety, in passing, that many of those even who are usually regarded in this light, are far more “ sinned against, than sinning ;” and if their homes could be visited, they would be seen to present an air of neatness and the evidences of comfort which would be quite astonishing, when compared with their limited advantages for securing them.

Among the higher classes there is no want of a knowledge of the good things of this life, or of the ability so to arrange the means at their disposal, as to make them productive of the most substantial good, present and prospective. Unlike fashionable people of other communities, they mostly live within their in-

comes, from whatever resources derived ; and hence, if they do not appear to make very rapid advances in the road to wealth, they manage well to maintain even appearances, and support such comforts, conveniencies and luxuries, as they appear to have for a long period been uniformly accustomed to. In this way they avoid many of the embarrassments that are common to those whose sole claim to "fashion" consists in the success they may meet with in making a commanding "show" on particular occasions. They keep up, apparently, an even tenor at all times,—seeming very wisely to consider that it is quite as proper for themselves to enjoy the fruits of their possessions or exertions, as that strangers should come in and have all heaped upon them. Not that I would represent them as being less hospitable than other people in this latitude: it does not appear that they are. Probably if trial were made—

means compared—the scale in this respect at least would turn in their favor.

It will not, it is believed, be expected of the writer, in speaking of the ability of the higher classes of colored society to maintain social intercourse on terms of respectability and dignity, to give an elaborate statement or inventory of the furniture of their dwellings—its quality and cost ;—the size of their market-baskets (an article, by the way, not to be lost sight of in making up the sum of a happy home !) and the usual character of their contents ;—it will not be necessary to say that their parlors are carpeted and furnished with sofas, sideboards, card-tables, mirrors, &c. &c., with, in many instances, the addition of the piano forte. These, with other relative matters, governed by no particular standard, the reader is left to form such an opinion of, as he may deem most correct ! I will say, however, that usually, according to pecuniary ability, they fail not to gratify themselves in



this wise, to the extent and after the manner that gains observance among other people.

Visiting *sans ceremonie* does not obtain to a very great extent with the higher classes of colored society. Even among those who are otherwise intimate acquaintances, the order of unceremonious visits is but limited. They are mostly by familiar or formal invitation, or in return for others previously received. This latter observance is most rigidly adhered to by many. Such as are its more determined votaries, will not attend upon a friend, even by particular invitation, unless their last call has been acknowledged by like return. The intimacy in such instances, however, as may be readily imagined, is not very great; and it seems rational to suppose there is very little care to continue that which may exist.

The period of paying and receiving visits, is mostly confined to the evening; among the gentlemen almost entirely so. Many circumstances combine to render this arrangement

most convenient and agreeable to all parties ; and as the same observance is respected in nearly all conditions of society in our money-seeking country, the chief cause of its adoption will be found too obvious to require particular reference.

Casual visiting with the young men is very common. Their attendance upon the ladies is mostly confined to visiting them at their dwellings. Very little out-door amusement is resorted to, as walking or riding excursions; but the reason of the non-observance of these, and one which is quite sufficient to prohibit them, is readily traceable to its proper source. With the young ladies at home they pass their evenings agreeably if so disposed. It is rarely that the visitor in the different families where there are two or three ladies, will not find one or more of them competent to perform on the piano-forte, guitar, or some other appropriate musical instrument; and these, with singing and conversation on what-

ever suitable topics that may offer, constitute the amusements of their evenings at home. The love of music is universal ; it is cultivated to some extent,—vocal or instrumental,—by all ; so that it is almost impossible to enter a parlor where the ear of the visitor is not, in some sort or other, greeted therewith. It is consequently made a prominent part of the amusements on all occasions of social meeting together of friends. The character of the conversation is usually varied, interesting and instructive. All the current topics of the time, appropriate and of sufficient interest, are elaborately discussed in a mild, dignified and becoming manner, in which the ladies mostly take part and contribute their full quota. The degree of promptness and ability often displayed on such occasions, is far surpassing the common opinion on this subject. The best informed persons could not but be pleasantly entertained, provided they could command sufficient courage to enable them to lay

aside, for the time, the mask of prejudice, (if blinded by it,) so as to be competent to take a just and an impartial view.

If prejudiced persons were to be governed more by positive knowledge—actual demonstration—than they are by rash, hasty, groundless conclusions, very different views than at present generally obtain, would soon be formed, respecting the degree of refinement and cultivation to be found among the higher classes of colored society. The ease and grace of manner with which they are capable of bearing themselves in company—their strict observance of all the nicer etiquettes, proprieties and observances that are characteristic of the well-bred—render their society agreeable and interesting to the most fastidious in such matters; and speak loudly against the injustice that is done them, in refusing to accord to them any knowledge, possession or practice of those qualities or accomplishments.

On occasions of appointed entertainments, which are usually in the form of evening parties, the greatest order and neatness of management is observed. There is always a first and second table, both appropriately and well stored, and in a manner generally unexceptionable. The guests at the parties consist only of such individuals or families as are accustomed to entertain their host or hostess, for the time, in a similar manner in their turn. Those who are all things in reception and nothing in return,—strangers, agreeable, entertaining and *eligible* bachelors, and sojourners in the city at *board*, always of course excepted,—are considered detrimental to the harmony of social intercourse; and, consequently, are very apt to be neglected in the list of invitations, that may be issued! In this way they manage to collect a very agreeable company, all perhaps on terms of perfect agreement and intimacy. The amusements of the evening are much the same as

before noticed,—music, conversation, &c.,—with the addition of exchanging “mottoes” taken from the “secrets’ papers,” which are to be found in plenteousness at all the regular evening parties.

The hours of retirement from the evening entertainments, are usually from ten to eleven o’clock—rarely beyond eleven. Many of the visitors leave as early as ten; and after the first movement, it is not long before the entertainers are in full and quiet possession of their parlors, recounting, as it is imagined, the incidents of the evening, and determining among themselves how every thing “passed off.”

The observance of abstinence at the parties of the higher classes of colored society—total abstinence from all that has a tendency to intoxicate—is worthy of remark. So far as my observation has extended, the only drinks that are presented—if indeed there are any others seen than the pure, unadulterated

ale of our first parents—may consist of lemonade, or some pleasant and wholesome syrup commingled with water. No wines of any description—not even the lightest and mildest—are ever brought forward. Whether this arises from a pure love of temperance or a disposition to avoid unnecessary expenditure, either of which is commendable, I shall not pause to inquire. But certain it is that the visitors at such times and places, who neglect to carry “merry hearts and laughing eyes” with them, will find nothing in the way of distillments to excite them after they get there. It is not intended to insinuate that there are no worshippers at the shrine of Bacchus among this class. It is to be feared there are. It will be observed, however, that I have spoken solely in relation to private entertainments, or social parties, where both sexes are present.

Enough has been said, it is conceived, on the subject of the social condition of the

higher classes of colored society, to convey to the mind of the stranger reader, a sufficient outline of the actual position they occupy. They are, indeed, far in advance of the peculiar circumstances by which they are surrounded. The exceedingly illiberal, unjust and oppressive prejudices of the great mass of the white community, overshadowing every moment of their existence, is enough to crush—effectually crush and keep down—any people. It meets them at almost every step without their domiciles, and not unfrequently follows even *there*. No private enterprise of any moment,—no public movement of consequence for the general good,—can they undertake, but forth steps the relentless monster to blight it in the germ. But in the face of all this, they not only bear the burthen successfully, but possess the elasticity of mind that enables them to stand erect under their disabilities, and present a state of



society of which, to say the least, none have just cause to be ashamed.

Yet I would not have them lose sight of the numerous evils existing among themselves, (adverted to in a preceeding part,) which have the effect greatly to retard their still further progress in the walks of cultivation and refinement. They have the elements among themselves—regardless of obstacles from without—for a more general and more uniform advancement; and it becomes them, peculiarly, to banish all those low-minded traits, as jealousy of each others' success, envy of advancement or conceived superiority; and endeavor to uphold and sustain, rather than to pull down and destroy all that any portion may not have yet attained to. The habit of detraction—of undermining each the other's worth and attainments—must be entirely banished. The effect of this practice often furnishes those whose minds are predisposed to unfavorable judgments, with a fruit-

ful source of forming additionally derogatory opinions. Those who indulge in it to an extent which leads to this, little think, in their anxiety to laud themselves, that they are aiming at their own best interests, in attempting to strike down the prosperity of those with whom they are so closely linked in destiny. Let, then, such unworthy considerations be entirely banished; and the general improvement of all will be seen to be two-fold greater than at present.

It is not my desire to be understood as an advocate for universal social union. Far from it. Such a union would not only be impracticable, but even could it take place, would, to say the least, be highly injudicious and prejudicial. If the virtuous and exemplary members of society should not keep aloof from the vicious and worthless, they would furnish no example to the latter to strive to make themselves reputable, and of like consideration. By associating with such persons we not only

thereby give countenance to their doings, but we degrade ourselves to their level, and are adjudged accordingly. Hence, distinctions and divisions on this ground, are in every respect commendable, proper and just; but it should be borne in mind, that this is the only just foundation—the condition of the mind and heart—upon which they can be made; and the only one that should govern the discrimination of the higher classes of colored society, particularly, in regulating their intercourse with each other.

## CHAPTER V.

Political Rights—First National Convention of People of Color—Character of Proceedings—Names of Delegates—Improvement of the People of Color—Public Meetings, Men and Measures—Contentions at Public Meetings, Rivalry, Opposition, &c. &c.

AMONG the very erroneous opinions that are formed, respecting the people of color, is the one that supposes them indifferent to the state of things by which they are surrounded, and that they make little or no effort for their relief. But this arises from the want of closer observance of their situation, and the nature and character of their disabilities. If the truth, which should be the aim of all, is faithfully sought, it will be found in the very reverse of this supposition. Never have any people, in proportion to their means of operation, made greater efforts for their entire en-

franchisement. It should be kept in view, that in Pennsylvania, particularly, and also in some other of the non-slaveholding states, they are almost, if not entirely, deprived of political rights and power; and that, consequently, in all matters relating to their interests, which involve legislative action, they must appear altogether in the attitude of suitors; and show themselves very humble in the exercise of even that prerogative. They cannot say to legislators, "if you fail to act for us, we shall not fail to act against you, when called to exercise the functions of electors;" they expect not, as yet, to be called to that exalted purpose; and this the former being well aware of, they take particular care to proceed in such manner only, as they deem best calculated to further their popularity with those who do possess and exercise that power. When a certain Secretary of State was asked "Why he did not promote merit?" he

promptly replied, "Because merit did not promote me!" This anecdote (which I have somewhere read,) represents the precise situation of our legislators. "Why do you not act for colored men?" "Because colored men did not act for me!" (And may not another question in this connexion be with propriety asked? "*Who hindered them?*") Thus it is necessary for the people of color to keep up an incessant *begging* of their *rulers* to legislate in their behalf; and with what effect is well known to all.

The first national movement of any importance among the people of color in this country, for the improvement of their general condition, took place in 1831.\* A call for a Na-

\* An effort was made the year previous by "The American Society of Free Persons of Color, for Improving their Condition," &c. &c., to organize a National Convention, but in consequence of a want of extensive notice in time, there was but a small representation, and consequently nothing of importance was transacted—saving to recommend Conventions annually thereafter. Hence this may be con-

tional Convention was issued by a society then in existence in Philadelphia, and the people in five states (three of which were, and are at present slaveholding,) responded thereto. The smallness of the number of states represented, and a part of those lying South of this, will be wondered at by some; but is easily accounted for, in various ways, which need not, however, be noticed here. The people were represented in the States of New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. Nothing is said in the minutes (from which I gather the information,) of any representation North or South of these. The delegates met in the city of Philadelphia on the 6th of June, and continued their sessions five days—probably intending considered the first regularly organized National Convention. The credit of its *origin*, is however, due to the “American Society,” &c., of which the RT. REV. RICHARD ALLEN was the *President*, and WILLIAM WHIPPER the *Corresponding Secretary*.

to give each of the states represented, a day to itself! It was hardly to be expected that under the auspices of a first annual assemblage, and that so meagrely attended, much good could be immediately effected; but the minutes show, that important improvements were contemplated, the most advantageous part of which, however, has never yet been carried into execution. Among the plans for future improvement, decided upon, was the establishment of a College or Manual Labor School in New Haven, Ct., in accordance with suggestions made to the Convention by three well known philanthropists, who in person attended upon its sittings. The plan submitted by those gentlemen\* to a committee of conference, appointed by the convention, estimated the cost of the College at about twenty thousand dollars, one thousand of which amount was conditionally subscribed by a gentleman on the spot, and agents ap-

\* Messrs. A. Tappan, S. S. Jocelyn, and W. L. Garrison.



pointed to collect the remainder. Nothing more at this time is heard of the contemplated Manual Labor School, so that it is now presumable that the difficulties in the way of its establishment were too great to be surmounted.

Since the period of the meeting of the first Convention—though only ten years—the condition of the people of color has undergone a great and beneficial change. The result of that movement was to resolve upon similar meetings annually, and so they have, in some form or other, been continued up to the present time. Measures were also taken to secure a more numerous and general attendance. Meetings were called and auxiliary societies formed in nearly all the states, cities and towns, where it was found practicable; and as soon as the people were aroused to the importance of the measure, it met with most hearty concurrence and support. “Persecution,” says the first conventional address,

“was the cause of our Convention;” and this same spirit and practice of persecution has not been wanting since then to keep the people on the alert in regard to their rights. But to the “first annual Convention” certainly belongs the credit of having blown the first great blast, by which the people were awakened to the importance of their own united and energetic action, in removing their disabilities and securing equal rights with other men. I, therefore, cheerfully take pleasure in doing what little I can towards crowning with immortality the names of the delegates who composed it.

NAMES OF THE DELEGATES,

*Who composed the First National Convention of the People of Color, held by adjournments in the City of Philadelphia, from the sixth to the eleventh of June, 1831.*

*Philadelphia.*

JOHN BOWERS, Pres't. of Convention.

DR. BELFAST BURTON.

JAMES CORNISH.

JUNIUS C. MOREL,  
 WM. WHIPPER, Secretary.

*Carlisle, Penn.*

JOHN PECK.

*Maryland.*

REV. ABNER COKER,  
 ROBERT COWLEY.

*New York.*

REV. WM. MILLER,  
 HENRY SIPKINS,  
 THOMAS L. JENNINGS, Assist. Sec'ry.,  
 WILLIAM HAMILTON.

*Long Island.*

JAMES PENNINGTON.

*Delaware.*

ABRAHAM D. SHAD, Vice President,  
 REV. PETER GARDNER.

*Virginia.*

WM. DUNCAN, Vice President.

There are other names mentioned in the

“ Minutes” as having taken part in the proceedings, but their names do not appear in the list of delegates. Among these are noticed the REV. CHARLES W. GARDNER, and the REV. SAMUEL TODD, who were appointed Chaplains to the Convention. I do not profess, in this brief notice, to give a connected history of the Convention, or the more immediate causes which gave rise to it; but only to notice such facts as are in this place deemed appropriate.

The ten years that have elapsed since the period to which I have adverted, have witnessed a great change in the condition and prospects of the people of color in Philadelphia.\* You could not find here now, as was the case then, a committee of intelligent men submitting to one of their meetings or other public bodies, in unqualified terms, “ the necessity of their deliberate reflection on the

\* This is not said in disparagement of the people elsewhere.

\* \* \* disolute, intemperate, and ignorant condition of the colored population ;” because the facts would by no means warrant the indiscriminate and sweeping assertion. The higher classes, at least, who form the subject of these sketches, are as chaste and as temperate as any other body of the population ; and, it may be added, as intelligent as thousands who have had better facilities afforded them.

The usual mode of expressing the popular will, in all free countries, by public assemblages of the people, obtains to the fullest extent with the people of color at the present time. They never let a subject of peculiar importance to them, that may be agitated in the community, pass without a public expression of their views and opinions in regard to it. Their inability to act with efficiency in the premises makes but little difference with most of the leading men. A meeting they must have. The sin of failing to remonstrate

against any scheme, that may be turned to their disadvantage, they are determined never to let rest upon their shoulders. This is certainly very praiseworthy, of itself considered; but the character of their proceedings are frequently very objectionable. Measures denunciatory are too often resorted to, which—especially when directed against those who will not be moved, by even the ordinary dictates of common right, where the people of color are concerned—are most assuredly calculated to defeat, rather than to achieve, the end desired. Instances of this description are to be found on any occasion of legislative attempt to abridge or deprive of existing rights. At such times, as is very natural, the proceedings of the Legislature are scanned with more than ordinary interest; and as soon as the cast of parties in the matter is ascertained, those who are found to be adverse to their interests, are, without more ado, set up as targets to be “abused at,” (no

better term is deserved,) instead of being selected for convincement and consequent conviction of their error.

This misguided course is often resorted to, in matters of far less importance than is here supposed, and likewise of altogether a different tenor and bearing. But in all such cases and, it may be added, with saints and sinners, very nearly the same effect is produced. No man likes to be abused into, or out of any measure. He is by such a course put upon the defensive, and driven to take stronger measures to sustain himself. Whether in the right or in the wrong, it would be apt to make but little difference; and even were it possible to convince him by senseless railing, he would be very slow to acknowledge it. It is left to metaphysicians to inquire into the nature of the courage by which he would be most likely to be prompted, but this we do know, that such is degenerate man. And how is it when such a one finds that his as-

sailants are composed of those whom he is already inclined to hold in contempt?—from whom, politically—without imputing any higher motive—he has nothing whatever to fear, and therefore, if he heeds them at all, it is with derision and scorn? What folly, then, for men of color thus to “offer war where they should kneel for peace;”—to attempt to coerce, where the only mode left is to sue the way to consideration and favor?

I should not neglect to state in this connection, that however severe the people of color may be in assailing their opponents, they are no less forward in expressing their gratitude to those who, on such occasions exert themselves in their behalf.

Among the evils which operate to produce the mode of proceeding, to which I have adverted, the constant competition among the “leading men” to take *the* lead in all matters of concern may be men-



tioned as one of the principal. The absence of discipline of mind and want of mature reflection, undoubtedly has a large share in it;—so hath oppression, which “maketh a wise man mad;”—but if momentary self-exaltation were a little less thought of, and the general good more, they would have ample time to provide themselves in these respects with the necessary qualifications for wiser and more deliberate action. There are too many men, who might otherwise be useful, who desire to be considered the leaders and the chiefs in every matter of interest that is agitated. They will not take part in forwarding any scheme, however well intended on the part of the original movers, unless they themselves were components of that original. This begets rivalry and contention in the public meetings. Rivalry must be sustained; and in order to do this, impeachment of motive and other personal assaults of words are resorted to. If these

fail to produce the end desired—of settling the question of precedence—attention is at last turned to the object the meeting may have been called to pass upon. Then, if the subject happens to be of the character before supposed, where “our dearest rights” are involved, the batteries are opened upon those who are known to be adverse to them. In this, nearly all the “leaders” and would-be leading men, are apt to join. Blustering, loud speaking and unlimited denunciation, are substituted for reason and common sense; and he who is most proficient in this respect and gains the loudest plaudits of the moment, thinks himself fairly entitled to the consideration he aimed to secure—of being the smartest and wisest of all his competitors! And this the thoughtless crowd—as is apt to be the case among every class of persons—too often award to no greater deserts. Thus is the general good made subservient to private ends; and thus, too, in the pursuit of those

ends, is the very object defeated which it was ostensibly the sole aim of all to effect.

The public meetings are likewise frequently made the scenes of personal disputes and quarrels, totally irrelevant to the matter for which they were assembled, and of no possible consequence to any but those directly engaged in them. In such cases the most ridiculous, vulgar and unmanly—not to say ungentlemanly!—exhibitions are often presented. A quarrel between two school boys is magnanimous when compared with it! Undoubtedly they do appear ridiculous in the eyes of the juveniles, who may at such times be looking on! But the parties themselves, in their enraged moments, are not in a condition to enter into the feelings of the calm, reflecting auditor. Of this I am well aware; and it is for this reason, that I have here taken occasion to help them to a picture of themselves, that they may see its defects and amend them. The belligerents in these windy

combats, surely know what belongs to decency,—or so much, at least, in charity must be allowed; and if they have no self-respect, they ought certainly to pay a little regard to the feelings and rights of those upon whom they intrude such scenes.\*

This evil of introducing private piques, preferences and antipathies into the public assemblages, convened for acting upon matters for the general good, operates badly in every way; and not among the least of its results is the effect it has of driving many useful men entirely out of the way of exerting themselves for the public good, by direct co-operation with others in matters of general interest that may command attention. Respecting themselves,—having no taste for

\* I have learned, recently, that certain moderate and discreet men of the community, having become disgusted with the frequency of the scenes here referred to, have determined to thrust out the participators therein, on all future occasions when attempts shall be made to bring them forward at the public meetings.

contention and strife,—they very properly keep aloof, and thereby save themselves from unpleasant feelings, and the discouragements which such disorderly proceedings are apt to engender. There are several who could be pointed out—men of sound judgment and mature minds—who are rarely seen to appear upon the platform of public action. This undoubtedly excites the wonder of some who know them, but who are not aware of the causes which, in this respect, keep them apparently silent. But if such were pressed for a reason, there is no doubt they would reply something to this effect—that they have no objection to visit a menagerie occasionally, for the sake of gratifying their love for natural history; but that they do not desire to enter an arena where the voracious animals are permitted, uncaged, to roam at large, and prey on whom they please! This would be a severe figure; but is it wholly void of application?

Besides those gentlemen who keep away from the public meetings, or go merely as spectators, there are others who do co-operate in this wise, but are not justly amenable to the charges of disreputable conduct adverted to. Their only culpability consists in giving a moment's heed to the impotent, harmless assaults of those who endeavor to gain importance by provoking a reply. They present themselves at a meeting with the best intentions in the world; they offer a suggestion in the same spirit; when forthwith, up starts some blustering Sir Oracle, to give, gratuitously, an unfailing indication of his own vulgar mind, and dishonest heart, by questioning the purity of the mover's intentions. He pauses not for examination or explanation; it is sufficient for him to know that the proposition comes from one, against whom he cherishes personal ill-will;—and that is the key to all his opposition—that with him is sufficient to outweigh all other con-

siderations ! The only alternate left then, is for the former to withdraw from the proceedings, or take upon him the hangman's duty of applying the scourge; and this it may truly be said, has sometimes been done, and with an effect that has operated to the no small discomfiture of the assailing party ! But why not visit the impeachment with contempt, and proceed peaceably and in order ? This may be answered by saying that our Sir Oracle may be one of those beings so insensible to refined feelings, or so puffed up with his own imagined consequence, that such treatment would defeat the object intended ; that mistaking contemptuous silence for fear, he might grow more obstreperous than before!—so that in either event contention and general disorder is quite unavoidable. Thus are well and peaceably disposed persons in a manner forced into the degrading scenes ; and are, therefore, to a greater or less extent excusable.

Now what is the effect of all this ? Does

any individual grow better or wiser by it? Who is aided or whose interests are promoted by such proceedings? Surely a more unwise course—one more certainly calculated to retard or defeat every beneficial undertaking—could not well be pursued!

If the standard of courtesy—since duelling is out of fashion!—was somewhat more elevated, much of the dissension which now divides the energies of men of color in Philadelphia, might be avoided. There are one or more “public men,” who, in this respect, are sadly at fault. They are not at all backward in laying claim to “all the decency” and all the good sense; and yet to witness their conduct on almost all public occasions, one would be led to think that they had been educated in a pigstye! The words honor, courtesy, self-respect, they seem never to have heard; or hearing, could never properly comprehend their import! So much at least is said in charity: for if they have



heard and do comprehend, they are most assuredly of a nature debased past reclaiming !

I have said that from a spirit of rivalry or some other cause, one class of the "leading men" in the colored community will not fall in with the suggestions or plans of another, unless themselves were party to the original movement. This is true to an extent which renders it almost impossible for the people to proceed together with unanimity on any given subject, however directly important to them, may be the issue. Instances have occurred, wherein the wishes of the majority have been totally misrepresented before the public, by an alteration of their proceedings, before sending them for publication, to gratify the private feelings of parties who may have been disappointed in the original results ! Probably these individuals may have got themselves appointed on a committee to attend to publishing the proceedings ; and have taken

advantage of the appointment to violate the trust reposed in them !

No one, of course, expects unanimity in all matters of policy among any people. Differences are expected and will always arise. But it is expected that those differences will be marked by an open, manly and honorable course of procedure, and not by low scheming and chicanery, if not positive dishonesty. It is hardly necessary to add, that those who merit reproach for indulgence in the last named practices, are always the very first to pounce upon and impeach the motives of their neighbors ! I will do them the favor to say, however, that the error of judging mankind by their own standard does not rest alone with them. The virtuous and good sometimes repose great confidence in persons totally unworthy of the trust, because they are too pure in mind to adjudge evil without testimony not to be mistaken ; and it is nothing extraordinary to see the reverse of the

proposition exemplified, by those who are themselves of questionable worth !

It is certainly to be hoped that the young men—and there are many of them—who are just entering the stage of public action, in behalf of their fellow men, will guard against the rocks and shoals upon which their senior cotemporaries have nearly wrecked all hopes of ever being able to do any permanent general good. Had they, instead of striving with and endeavoring to destroy each other, united their energies and labored for the mutual benefit of all, they might have presented a state of society which would have been an invincible argument against the tyrannical act\* of the ever memorable “Reform Convention,” and perhaps secured for their posterity all of the “rights, privileges and immunities” enjoyed by other citizens of the Commonwealth. The young men may, therefore, building upon past results, rest assured, that

\* Disfranchisement.

until they learn to respect themselves, and the rights, feelings and interests of their brethren, they can never hope to gain the respect of others, or attain to any remarkable point of political consideration, or private worth.

## CHAPTER VI.

General Remarks—Literary Societies—Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons—Rush Library Company and Debating Society—Demosthenian Institute—Minerva Literary Association—Edgeworth Literary Association—Gilbert Lyceum—New Association Contemplated.

THE number and character of the institutions for the promotion of literature in any community, may be justly regarded as an un-failing indication of the tastes and morals of its components. It would be vanity here to attempt to illustrate the effects of education upon society, or to describe the superior worth and prosperity of communities in which it is generally diffused among all classes, over those where the majority of the people remain in comparative ignorance. The aspiring disposition that education imparts to its possessor—the continued, insatiable desire for more, more, the farther he progresses—is

of itself sufficient to show its inestimable worth in fitting us for the high stations in the scale of being, designed by the Creator that we should occupy. He who implanted the mind and endowed it with certain capabilities and faculties of developement, hath also placed in our power the *means* thereof; and happy is he who makes the best use of them.

Among no people, in proportion to their means and advantages, is the pursuit of knowledge more honored than among the colored inhabitants of Philadelphia. The exalted standard in the world of letters, which characterizes the favored class, is by them seconded to the utmost extent in their power. Many of them seem, in this respect, to have fully entered into the spirit of taste and refinement of those by whom they are surrounded; and their success is seen to be such, as of which they have no reason to be ashamed. The actual standard of literary acquirements, it is true, even among the best

informed class, is nothing extraordinary of itself considered; they have engaged in the pursuit of knowledge more for its own sake—the adornment which it gives them—than from any relative or collateral advantages which could be expected; they have not been stimulated and encouraged to seek education as a *trade*, which would well repay their assiduity and the pecuniary cost of the pursuit: and, therefore, in the absence of all those cheering motives which impel others, to expect a higher state of advancement than they at present exhibit, would be illiberal if not unjust.

The educated man of color, in the United States, is by no means, so far as he may be affected by exterior circumstances, the *happiest* man. He finds himself in possession of abilities and acquirements which fit him for most of the useful and honorable stations in life, where such qualities are requisite; but does he find—can he even with reason antici-

pate—their ever being in like manner appreciated and rewarded? If there was nothing in education to recommend *itself*, well might reason be construed against the utility of the man of color's entering its paths ; aye, well might *he* conclude within himself, that with the people of color “ignorance is bliss!” and for them it is, therefore, “folly to be wise !” “He that is robbed, let him not know it, and he is not robbed at all.”

But education possesses its own intrinsic worth, which it imparts to those who enter its pursuits. Of this, colored Philadelphians seem to be fully aware; and as one important avenue towards further advancement and perfection, they have established numerous literary associations, the most prominent of which it is here proposed briefly to notice.

Among the earliest established of these institutions, stands first—

“THE PHILADELPHIA LIBRARY COMPANY OF  
COLORED PERSONS.”



This Company was instituted January 1st, 1833. The number of persons present at its formation, and who signed the Constitution, were nine ; whose names are here given :— Messrs. Frederick A. Hinton, James Needham, (now *Treasurer*, and who kindly furnished these particulars,) James Cornish, Robert C. Gordon, junr., John Dupee, William Whipper, J. C. Bowers, Charles Trulier, Robert Douglass, junr., and James C. Mathews ;—who may be considered the founders of the first successful literary institution of this description, established by the colored classes in Philadelphia.

The object of the Company, as its title implies, was the collection of a library of useful works of every description for the benefit of its members, who might there successfully apply, without comparatively any cost, for that mental good which they could not readily obtain elsewhere. This enterprise met with great encouragement, both in the way

of donations of books, pamphlets, maps, &c., and otherwise ; so that in a short time a large and valuable collection was made. A systematic order of reading was then adopted by the members, to the very great advantage of those who persevered therein. In connexion with this, a system of debates was introduced, for the purpose of stimulating the members to historical and other researches, and for practising them in the arts of elocution and public speaking.

Soon after the establishment of the Library Company—their numbers having greatly augmented—application was made to the Legislature for an act of incorporation. In this they also met with speedy success—corporate existence having been granted them in the early part of 1836. From this period the Company rapidly increased in numbers and usefulness, until at the present time the roll book presents the names of about one hundred (including a number of honorary)

members ; all of whom have partaken of its benefits.

The debating department has of late greatly improved in regard to the intelligence and ability of those who usually participate therein. Discussions of interesting subjects, take place on Tuesday of each week.

The Library at present contains nearly six hundred volumes of valuable historical, scientific and miscellaneous works, among which are several Encyclopædias, and is a source of great mental profit to the members of the Company. Among those who took an interest in, and contributed towards the collection of the Library, was the late Right Reverend Bishop WHITE, of the Protestant Episcopal church.

The fee of admission to membership of the institution, is such as to place it within the reach of every one disposed to connect themselves therewith. It is *one dollar* ; and the

monthly assessment thereafter, *twenty-five cents*.

The Company, at the present time, holds its meetings in the basement of St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, South Fifth street, where persons, so disposed, are at liberty to visit and judge for themselves of its probable character.

The progress of this institution has been marked by evidences of the most gratifying character—gratifying to all who delight to witness the progress of knowledge and refinement among their fellow-men. Many a young man of color in this community, who previous to the establishment of "The Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons" never dreamed of rising before a public auditory to make an address, or engage in a debate, is now enabled to do so with little or no embarrassment, and in a manner highly creditable.

The next, in the order of its formation, comes—

“THE RUSH LIBRARY COMPANY AND DEBATING SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA.”

This Society was formed on the 16th of December, 1836; and, as will be seen, is several years younger than its predecessor. Present at its formation there were seven persons, as follows:—Messrs. John L. Hart, (now the *President*—and to whom I am indebted for these particulars,) William D. Banton, Littleton Hubert, Harrison R. Sylva, James Bird, and Charles Brister. In about two months after this beginning, the list of its members had increased to twenty-two; at which period an act of incorporation was granted by the Legislature, bearing date March 1, 1837.

The object aimed at, by the founders of the “Rush Library Company and Debating Society,” was the same as that of the one first noticed. They have succeeded in collecting

a handsome library, at the present time numbering two hundred volumes, and gradually increasing. Its contents are, of course, of a miscellaneous character; but all of the books are useful, and among them many valuable works. From this source the members have derived great advantages.

The debating department is also maintained with spirit—many of the members evidencing much ability in the discussion of the various questions that are brought before them. This is likewise, to the members, a source of great improvement in elocution and public speaking.

The roll book of the Rush Library Company, at the time this is written, (June, 1841,) numbers thirty members, with occasional additions. Its place of meeting is at “Salters’ Hall,” Elizabeth street.

Those best acquainted with the affairs of this institution, are of opinion that it is “one of the most really useful, of its kind, among

the colored classes, in the city ;”—that others may equal it in regard to the benefits derivable therefrom, but none surpass. This opinion is, in all probability, nothing more than is justly due. If the energy and enterprise of its President may be taken as a sample of the spirit that characterizes the body of its members, there is no doubt but that “The Rush Library Company and Debating Society of Pennsylvania,” will eminently keep pace, in the onward march of improvement, with the best of its contemporaries.

I shall now proceed to notice an institution which was originally composed of young men in their minority, and who were thereby excluded from the membership of those previously established. It was this exclusion, if I am correctly informed, which chiefly gave rise to the now flourishing—

“DEMOSTHENIAN INSTITUTE.”

This association was formed January 10, 1839, at the house of Mr. John P. Burr ; at

which time and place, the following named young men were elected its officers:—John E. Burr, President; David Gordon, Vice President; Benjamin Stanley, Secretary; William Jennings, Treasurer; G. W. Gibbons, Librarian; Lewis B. Meade, E. Parkinson, Zedekiah J. Purnell, A. F. Hutchinson, and B. Hughes, the Board of Managers.

In the course of inquiries respecting the condition and progress of the “Demosthenian Institute,” I have been furnished by the President, Mr. Z. J. Purnell, and the Secretary, Mr. T. S. Crouch, with a brief written history, containing particulars, and from it make the annexed extract:—

“Here [at the house of Mr. Burr] the meetings were held for nearly a year, during which time several addresses were delivered and numerous questions discussed;—but in the presence of the members only, owing to a general wish that the Institute should be made a preparatory school, until the members



had gained sufficient confidence and experience, to fit them for an appearance before a public auditory. As the institute emerged from its obscurity, the number of its members rapidly augmented, till it became necessary to secure a more commodious place of meeting. Accordingly, *Salters' Hall* was engaged; and the first meeting of the Institute there, took place December 18th, 1839."

From the period here mentioned, to the present, the "Demosthenian Institute" has continued its meetings at "Salters' Hall;" where, though but of recent origin, it has, in the words of its President, "made a great deal of noise;" though not, it is believed, without much good reason. The addresses and course of lectures during the past season (1840-41,) show great energy and enterprise on the part of its members, and also forcibly exhibit the abiding interest which actuates them for its continued prosperity and usefulness. It should also be borne in mind, that

these lectures, are the work, chiefly, of the members of the Institute ; and it is very doubtful whether many of them ever ventured before the public, for such purposes, previous to becoming connected therewith.

The debating department has likewise been a source of great improvement to the young men of the "Demosthenian Institute." In this respect they have not remained in the rear of their predecessors. They are still improving, and will, ere long, be undoubtedly enabled to cope with the oldest of those in existence before them.

The members of the Institute number, at the present time, forty-two, with a gradual increase. Its Library contains over one hundred volumes, comprising many valuable historical and scientific works.\*

\*Shortly after this notice of the "Demosthenian Institute" was written, I was shown the first number of a very neat little paper, entitled the "DEMOSTHENIAN SHIELD," which has been established by the enterprise of the young

Having now endeavored in a few words, to point out the condition and chief sources of improvement afforded by the literary associations among the gentlemen, I shall proceed briefly to glance at those in existence among the ladies. The first of these that comes under notice is—

“THE MINERVA LITERARY ASSOCIATION.”

This association was formed in “October, 1834.” There were present at the formation men who compose the Institute, and intended to be published weekly, from the time of its first appearance, (June 29, 1841.) Its subscription list numbered “over one thousand subscribers” before the first number was issued—and success, therefore, seems certain. Its typographical appearance is very neat; and, judging from No. 1, it promises dignity—which is very important—and ability in the editorial department. The whole is calculated to reflect great credit upon the “*Demosthenian Institute*,” and is a far better evidence of its onward march, in general improvement, than the brief notice we had taken of it, previous to the appearance of the “Shield.” It is pleasing, therefore, to see what was said hereby so promptly corroborated.

tion thirty ladies, all of whom constituted themselves members. With this good beginning, the daughters of the goddess whose name they bear, went into immediate active operation ; and were soon permanently organized into a school for the encouragement and promotion of polite literature. The order of their exercises were readings and recitations of original and selected pieces, together with other appropriate matters. Many of the essays and other original productions, both in prose and poetry, have been deemed highly meritorious, and at different periods have appeared in the "poets' corner" or other department of some of the friendly publications.

"The Minerva Literary Association" is composed of a large number of members at the present time. It still holds its meetings once each week as heretofore, to the improvement and edification of all who are connected with it.

There is also among the ladies—  
 “THE EDGEWORTH LITERARY ASSOCIATION,”  
 whose object and exercises are so identically  
 the same as those of the “Minerva,” that a re-  
 petition thereof seems unnecessary. It is suf-  
 ficient to say that the ladies consider them both  
 worthy of being cherished, which is a suffi-  
 cient guaranty that they are not wanting in  
 importance and usefulness.\*

The last of the literary institutions which I  
 shall here notice, is the nondescript—

“GILBERT LYCEUM.”

This institution is composed, as will be  
 seen by the names of its founders, of indivi-  
 duals of both sexes, and is the first, and only  
 one established by the colored classes of Phi-  
 ladelphia, for both literary and scientific pur-

\* It may be due to the ladies, and therefore proper to  
 state, that I should have very cheerfully taken a more ex-  
 tended notice of the “Minerva,” and the “Edgeworth,”  
 had I not failed in attempts to procure such authentic in-  
 formation, in regard to them, as was requisite to a correct  
 detailed understanding of their condition, &c. &c.

suits. The name "Gilbert" is prefixed in honor to the gentleman of that name, who recommended its formation. It is of but recent origin,—instituted (as I am informed by Mr. R. Douglass, junr.) January 31, 1841. The persons who composed the meeting, that gave it a "local habitation and a name," were eleven in number—as follows :—Messrs. Robert Douglass, senr., Joseph Cassey, Jacob C. White, John C. Bowers, Robert Purvis ; and Mrs. Amy M. Cassey, Miss Sarah M. Douglass, Mrs. Hetty Burr, Mrs. Grace Douglass, Mrs. Harriet Purvis, and Miss Amelia Bogle.

In consequence of the late period of its formation, the "Lyceum" has not been able to do much towards effecting the objects of its formation. It has, however, already had a course of scientific and other lectures delivered before it, which generally have been well attended. It is understood, also, that the "Lyceum" proposes the collection of a

cabinet of minerals, curiosities, &c., as soon as its permanent organization will admit of so doing.

The number of members at the present time are about forty—exhibiting a great increase in a short period. If governed by a proper spirit, the “Gilbert Lyceum” may no doubt be made a source of improvement to its members, not to be surpassed by any literary institution previously in existence.

In addition to those already established, and in active operation, it is in contemplation with a number of young men, to form a new literary association, the object of which will be to encourage and promote among the colored classes, literature, science and the arts; and to embody all the good features of those now in existence, while it will be the aim to avoid such as have proved disadvantageous. The plan of this contemplated institution, as drawn up and exhibited to me by Mr. *James*

*Needham*, is of the most liberal and enlightened character; and seems well calculated to become universally popular, with all the lovers and seekers of knowledge in the colored community. It proposes that “not only the learned, but the unlearned—the old and the young—male and female—without any other qualification than a good character, should become members;” and that frequent meetings should be held, and have such a varied detail of exercises presented at each, as might be found best calculated to call into exercise the degree of education and ability of each member. It is further proposed to have “lectures delivered, by competent persons, at stated periods;—to encourage men of color to become professors in particular branches of science;—to establish a library, collect a cabinet of minerals, and procure philosophical apparatus,” as soon as its permanent or-



ganization might allow of so doing. This seems to be in every way plausible and practicable ; and if carried out in the spirit of the outline here given, could not possibly fail to be of great advantage, to such as might connect themselves therewith.

There are some errors that have become matters of course with the older associations, which it would be well for the one now in contemplation, studiously to guard against. The ease and facility with which persons applying have succeeded in getting themselves voted to the membership, has had the effect to incorporate a large number of young men who take little, or no interest whatever, in the prosperity and success of the institution, after they have once got their names enrolled as members. They seldom appear at the stated meetings for any purpose ; and many of them never appear for the purpose of complying with the periodical assessment !

This class of self-constituted *honorary members* should, if possible, be kept out; for no society can for any length of time withstand the evil influence that is generated by their conduct. A heavy, immoveable weight; they totally destroy the usefulness of the association whose constitution they have subscribed to support, and dishearten those who are sensible of the obligation, and earnestly desire to acquit themselves accordingly. All such, be it repeated, should be steadily shunned.

These short notices of the principal literary institutions, though not so full and comprehensive as was originally contemplated, will be sufficient to show that the colored classes are not at all behind the age, in their efforts to raise the standard of education and polite literature, to a much greater height among themselves than they have yet been enabled to do. Heretofore they have had to

encounter innumerable discouragements, in almost every ennobling undertaking; but these there is every reason to believe, will be withdrawn, in proportion as the former shall demonstrate by their acts, the gross injustice of their infliction. This, it is contended, they have long ago done—in fact they *never deserved* the tyrannical prejudices they are constantly exposed to—but the great community have closed their eyes to this view of the case, and seem resolved that nothing short of a “miraculous working of their own salvation” shall ever secure to them those equitable and just considerations which are enjoyed by all others of a different descent. And even this the people of color are equal to, if they will only give a right direction to the elements which they have among themselves. It becomes them, of all others, to be *united* in all efforts for their general improvement; and whether they will hereafter seek to banish the unworthy causes upon which their

present disunion is founded,—a disunion which renders them, as a body, powerless for good in any common cause, and so furnishes rich food for prejudice,—time will make known. There is, unquestionably, much to be done, and *the sooner it is done*, the sooner will they secure that estimation, from those who now oppress them, which is undoubtedly the aim of all, and without which they can never hope for entire enfranchisement, or live in quiet, undisturbed possession of their civil liberty. Let them, then, take a lesson from the past ; and let the future be devoted to amendment.















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